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ABSTRACT

This study sought to determine the primary sources of stress for 48 Alabama school teachers who attended a workshop on stress management. Survey questions were grouped into three categories: vulnerability for stress, job stressors, and current status. Tables present data on each of these categories as well as on the educational and personal characteristics of the teachers. Results of the survey revealed that for the group, there was a relatively low incidence of vulnerability for stress. However, a tendency for physical stressors such as a lack of vigorous exercise and inapprorpiate weight had a greater effect on vulnerability than did emotional stressors. Highest job stressors were associated with lack of time, disruptive students, small instructional funds, and relationship with supervisors. In most cases, stressors not directly related to the classroom received lower stress scores. (JD)

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Sources of Stress for Teachers

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Introduction and Background of Study

"I've had it," "There's got to be a better way," "I'm getting out," "There's just to much paper work," You hardly have time to teach anymore," "School used to be fun, but now....." These expressions are being heard more and more each day as teachers struggle to make it through another school day.

The problem of stress is very big and growing. Teachers try to accomplish too many things in too little time. They exhibit a chronic sense of time urgency. They feel the pressure of deadlines. And they cope with the dilemma of working with ambiguous responsibilities: fielding the requests and frustrations of students while trying to understand and adjust to the problems of scarce resources.

Furthermore, many teachers have no idea where the day goes. In addition to teaching, many feel so pressured by the constant flow of memoranda, reports, and meetings that they finish the day wondering what they really accomplished. The real frustration sets in when they find themselves working at a frenetic pace without satisfaction, but uncertain about what to do next.

Another source of stress comes from interactions with administrators. (Caram, 1982) and (Caram, Dworkin, and Croft, 1983) note that the principal's role as a faculty evaluator is significantly associated with teacher alienation and quitting behavior.

The role of the teacher is beset by stresses and strains. Teachers are finding forces with which they must deal to be increasing in intensity and complexity. The job of a teacher can be hazardous to one's health. Work stress is robbing many teachers of their health and happiness. In short, being a teacher is a stressful job.

Social scientists have long been concerned with occupational stress. According to (Phillips, 1979) the classroom has been identified as a stressful work environment. Literally thousands of teachers have reported both physical and mental illnesses related to teaching.

(Saunders, 1982) reports that job-related stress has diminished the satisfaction that many teachers derive from their work, caused many good teachers to choose alternative careers, and lessened the energy and creativity outstanding teachers bring to their classrooms. However, little systematic research has been focused upon this concern in Alabama (Saunders, 1982).

The major purpose of this study was to determine what the primary sources of stress were for forty eight Alabama teachers.

Results

Subjects

This survey sample consisted of a total of 48 individuals of whom 92 percent were females. Participants from six Alabama public school systems attending workshops in stress management were asked to complete a stress assessment survey. The survey was designed to elicit responses to questions that were grouped into three categories. These categories were: Vulnerability for Stress, Job Stressors, and Current Status. Frequencies and percentages of responses to survey items were computed. Classroom teachers were the most frequently represented with 92% of the sample. Counselors and support personnel represent by 8% of the sample. Forty percent of the participants had 1 to 10 years experience. The masters degree was the highest degree held by 63% of the subjects. Table 1 depicts these educational characteristics.

Table 1

Educational Characteristics of Participants

Characteristics	N	%
Educational Position		
Teacher	44	92
Counselor	4	8
Years Experience		
1 - 10	19	39.7
11 - 15	11	23.0
16 - 20	11	23.0
21 - 30	7	14.7
Highest Degree Obtained		
BA/BS	13	27
Masters	30	63
Above Masters	5	10

Ages ranged from 28 to 64 years with a mean of 40.0 years. Participants' weights ranged from 60 inches to 74 inches with a mean of 65 inches. Body weight ranged from 108 pounds to 254 pounds with an average of 151 pounds. Marital status of the group consisted of 54% married, 13% single, 29% divorced and 4% were widowed. Racially the respondents were 70% white, 10% black, and the remaining 10% did not respond to this question. Table 2 reports these personal characteristics of participants.

Table 2

Personal Characteristics

Personal Data	N	%
Gender		
Male	4	8.0
Female	44	92.0
Age		
28 - 33	11	23.0
34 - 40	17	36.0
41 - 49	12	25.0
50 - 64	8	17.0
Height		
60 - 65	32	67
66 - 70	12	25
71 - 74	4	8
Weight		
108 - 123	8	19
124 - 135	9	21
136 - 155	11	26
156 - 254	15	35
Marital Status		
Single	6	13
Married	26	54
Divorced	14	29
Widowed	2	4

Race		
Black	3	10.0
White	34	71

Vulnerability For Stress

Participants were asked to indicate from a list of stressors the ones that applied to them. These data are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Vulnerability for Stress

Statement	Almost Always %	Undecided %	Almost Never %
1. I eat at least one hot balanced meal a day.	85	15	0
2. I get 7 to 8 hours sleep at least 4 nights a week.	83	11	6
3. I give and receive affection regularly.	92	6	2
4. I have at least one relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.	83	6	11
5. I engage in vigorous aerobic exercise at least 3 times per week for at least 15 minutes each time.	20	15	65
6. I limit myself to less than half a pack of cigarettes a day.	78	0	22
7. I drink fewer than 3 alcoholic drinks a week.	88	0	12

8. I am at the appropriate weight for my height.	37	15	48
9. I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses.	71	17	12
10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.	90	6	4
11. I regularly attend club or social activities.	44	22	34
12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.	86	8	6
13. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.	85	4	11
14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth).	75	21	4
15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.	73	12	15
16. I have regular conversations with the people I live with about domestic problems --chores, money, etc.	77	16	7
17. I do something fun at least once a week.	68	17	15
18. I am able to organize my time effectively.	65	17	18
19. I drink fewer than 3 cups of coffee (or other caffeine-rich drinks) a day.	60	13	27
20. I take some quiet time for myself during the day.	56	25	19

Group data from this area tended to support the assumption that respondents in this sample have relatively low vulnerability for stress. For example 92% indicated they give and receive affection regularly. Another 88% drink fewer than 3 alcholic

drinks per week. Ninty percent receive strength from their religious beliefs, and 86% had a network of friends and acquaintances for support. Eighty five percent said they eat at least one hot balanced meal a day, and have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters. Responses indicating some vulnerability to stress were revealed; 65% reported they did not engage in vigorous exercise, and 48% felt that they were overweight. Interestingly 25% of the participants said that they were undicided whether or not they took some quiet time for themselves during the day. Another 21% were undicided about the status of their health.

Table 4

Job Stressors

Stressors	Affirmative Responses Percentage
1. Too much to do and too little time in which to do it.	89
2. I don't know the basis used to evaluate me.	44
3. I need more feedback on my personal performance.	63
4. My job interferes with my personal life.	33
5. I am trapped in my job with no options.	17
6. I am unable to influence decisions that affect me.	40
7. I feel that my job and personal values are in conflict.	9
8. I waste much time in unproductive meetings.	50
9. The majority of my time is spent in routine tasks.	71
10. Good work is unappreciated.	54

11. I am isolated from others.	37
12. Parent conferences.	64
13. Conferences with supervisors.	63
14. Managing "disruptive" students.	74
15. Disagreement with supervisor.	67
16. Lack of availability of instructional funds.	74
17. Implementing Board of Education policies.	26
18. Target of verbal abuse by students.	24
19. My salary.	43
20. Too little authority to carry out my responsibilities.	28

Table 4 shows that respondents indicated that the highest job stressors were attributed to too much to do in too little time (89%), managing disruptive students (74%), and lack of instructional funds (74%). These stressors were followed closely by disagreement with supervisor (67%) and the need for more feedback on personal performance (63%). Respondents reported relatively low scores on stressors such as trapped in job with no options (17%) and job and personal values in conflict (9%). Only 43% felt that their salary was a stress factor.

Table 5

Current Stress Status

Factor	Agree %	Undecided %	Disagree %
1. I feel little or no stress right now.	73	13	14
2. Usually, I feel a great deal of stress at work.	38	15	14
3. When I must wait in line for something, I seldome become impatient.	38	23	40
4. I become quite impatient when someone takes too long to say something or finish a sentence.	48	23	29
5. When I have no work to do (on a vacation or holiday), I often feel guilty.	27	4	69
6. I get quite anxious when things don't go as planned.	64	13	23
7. I get extremely irritated when interrupted while working at some task.	69	8	23

The current stress status of participates is reflected in Table 5. Seventy three percent responded that they felt little or no stress right now, however 27% of the group were evenly divided on whether or not they were stressed. A number of respondents (38%) indicated that they experienced a great deal of stress at work. Relatively high levels of stress were also attributed to anxious feelings when things don't go as planned, (64%) and becoming extremely irritated when interrupted while

working at some task (69%). Little guilt was felt for having no work to do during vacation or holidays with 69% of respondents reflecting this sentiment.

Conclusion

The results of this survey reveal that as a group there is a relatively low incidence of vulnerability for stress. However, the data revealed a tendency for physical stressors such as a lack of vigorous exercise and inappropriate weight had a greater effect on vulnerability than did emotional stressors such as giving and receiving affection and strength from religious beliefs. Overall, respondents received greater support from emotional factors in their lives than they did from physical factors.

Even though there was low vulnerability for stress, respondents indicated that they experience job stress. A summary of job related stressors revealed highest stress scores when associated with time, students, instructional funds, and relationship with supervisor. In most cases stressors that were not directly related to the classroom received lower stress scores.

The responses in this study relating to the topic of current stress tended to support the observation that teachers have considerable stress on the job but much lower stress in their personal lives outside the schoolroom.

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